

“For Just Such a Time As This”

Mark 4:26-32; Esther 4 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – May 4, 2025
Consecration Sunday 2025-2026 ~ “Unrevealed Until Its Season”

*Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might know clearly
what our blessings are and how you are calling us to use them. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Let me be the first to say it: the story of Esther is pretty horrifying. The drama that it begins with is horrifying. But the drama it ends with, once the tables are turned, is equally horrifying. There are many reasons to give thanks that there are not very direct parallels from this story to our own lives. And yet, the heightened stakes, the life-or-death consequences of this story illustrate some principles and dynamics that can be fruitful for us to consider. They can even provide us with important lessons for practicing the spiritual discipline of stewardship that we're lifting up today, as we gather for Consecration Sunday.

Our stewardship theme this year, “Unrevealed Until Its Season,” is a reflection of the current moment we're in as a congregation: we've been discussing the future for over six months now, naming that it's not clear yet where God is leading us, but that we can tell we need to shift direction somehow to flourish in the coming years. We have thrown around all sorts of ideas to see what sparks, and now we have entered into a season of prayer, waiting on the movement of the Holy Spirit. Our story today is about a moment when the season was revealed, in painful clarity, and what is

required to meet that moment when it arrives. The story is horrifying, but if we pan back from the gory details, we can learn something from the lessons offered by the dynamics at work in this passage.

At root, this is a story about power and how we use power. Now, you hear that word, and you may not think it applies to you; you may not occupy a traditional position of power. But all of us have some power: we have resources and capacity; we have the hours in each day and some freedom to decide how we spend them. This story invites us to consider all the different kinds of power, authority or capacity we have. What resources are yours to distribute? What relationships could you leverage if you needed to? How do you spend your time, and how could you shift that as necessary to create change or protect something important to you?

The story of Esther also reminds us that much of our power is conditional. Your boss might really like you because you usually keep your head down and get your work done and don't talk back; if you suddenly spoke up to protest an injustice in your workplace, that good will might evaporate instantly. Are there parts of yourself, your identity or your principles that you keep under wraps in order to make your life easier, the way Esther didn't reveal that she was Jewish when she was chosen as queen? Living without full honesty about who we are makes us vulnerable. If we believe that what we have is dependent on not revealing our true selves, we are always in danger of being exposed, and we will never wield the authority we do have because of that fear.

These are the kind of dynamics it's helpful to think through before they explode into drama all around us. Otherwise, we run the risk of failing to meet the moment. What positions or privileges do you have that are important to you? What would you be willing to risk them for? What would the stakes have to be to make you willing to sacrifice the things that make your life easier and better?

Esther was resistant to Mordecai's pleas at first. I can't do the thing you're asking me to do; I would probably die. So what was it that finally moved her? Was it concern for her people? Or was it Mordecai's warning that she herself would also be eliminated if she did nothing? "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews," he said. Dead if you do (maybe); dead definitely if you don't. Is that what got her to declare, "If I perish, I perish"?

What does it take for us to determine that we're going down fighting? What are the principles for which you would risk your position, your comfort, your relationships? This seems like a dramatic question that might not apply to much of our lives. But if we lower the temperature on the stakes of the question, it's an issue that comes up continually in our lives. What are we willing to give our resources – time, money, social capital – for, even when it might involve some risk to our comfort or social standing? Would you talk to a stranger about your church, even if they might think you're weird? Would you make a pledge, even if you're not sure which little indulgences you'll give up to find the money to fulfill it? What compromises have we made and will we know when it's time to stand on principle instead?

One of the things about risk in church is that we're not very good at seeing it clearly. Usually, we can only see the risk in trying something new. What's invisible to us is the risk of not trying anything. It seems fair to say that over the past seven months, God has been showing us that doing nothing to help our church adapt to the emerging future is no longer an option. So we have begun to let go of some of the risk aversion that kept us from moving forward. We are at another moment for that kind of assessment today. Each of us is being asked what we're willing to give for this community that is important to us. Your time, your talents, your resources – the blessings you have received. How tightly or lightly are you being called to hold those blessings? How is God asking you to use them?

Do we know what will happen when we step out in faith and offer what we have to what God is doing here? We do not. Just as Esther did not know what would happen when she approached the king, just as the sower did not know how the seeds would be transformed into grain, we offer these intentions in faith. We come in hope, asking God's blessing on the sacrifices we are making. We come with joy, desiring to be a place of Christ-like hospitality, where the "birds of the air" can find a home. We come with gratitude, knowing the blessings we already have, even those we're just beginning to realize we have, are from God and to be used for God's purposes. We come in prayer, listening, together, for where God is leading, preparing ourselves to be ready to meet the moment when it is revealed. We come, following the Risen Christ, into a future of hope. Hallelujah and Amen.